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in different countries, but always uniform in size, weight, and value, and always receivable for debts at its full worth.

By the adoption of such a common coin we in America would gain something and lose nothing, even in home transactions. Our stay-at-homes, ever in a large, if relatively decreasing, majority, who now are spared the anguish of reckoning in pounds, francs, marks, and florins in a single week, would be relieved of the by no means small inconvenience caused by Canadian coins of precisely equal value with our own, yet which can sometimes be "passed" and sometimes not. It is absurd that a Canadian dollar or quarter should not be as good in New York as in Ottawa, when but a simple agreement is necessary to make it so. Any impairment of the validity of contracts could be avoided, if our gold and silver coins were decreased in size, by legislation providing that all obligations incurred under the old law should be payable according to the old value of the coins. Many of our people have long been clamoring for a "smaller dollar." Here is the proper way to get it. Perhaps their instinct is right in the matter. Ours is about the only country which can stand so large a monetary unit. The shilling is the real unit in English transactions, as the expression "three and six" proves. The nations which enjoy a small unit, like the franc, have many advantages over those with a larger unit like the mark or florin.

The financier, the politician, the gold-bug, the silver-king, would discover objections, some very serious, and obstacles, many very real, to an international measure of value. I am not trying to appropriate the viewpoint of either. But the plain citizen who has listened aghast to the babble of forty discordant mints will agree that it is so desirable that no number of obstacles ought to stand in the way.

JOHN L. HEATON.

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#### SHALL WE ENDOW OUR AUTHORS?

THE hardships, vexations, and disappointments of the literary calling have often been made known to the public. From the days of the "impransus" Johnson, struggling through fifty years of poverty, down to those of Hood coining jests to keep the wolf from his door, and the late J. G. Wood leaving his family in destitution after a life of unceasing toil, we have heard the same "old, old story" of the unrequited toil of authors; of the daily hand-to-hand and foot-to-foot struggle with adversity for the means of living by men who in other callings might have enjoyed a competence and ease, if not "riches fineless." If, in some respects, the position of the literary man has improved since the days of Grub Street and lordly patronage, yet facts of daily occurrence show, it is said, that the author's millenium is still many ages distant. So far are poets from feeding on nectar and dwelling amid rose-leaves and perfumes, while publishers, hat in hand, kneel by the side of their Sybaritic couches and beseech them for new volumes, that they are lucky if they can keep soul and body together. The fate of not a few authors is prefigured in the experience of one who, on going out of a provision shop where he had done his humble marketing, found that his bacon was wrapped up in a sheet of one of his own productions, and his cheese in a leaf of another. When Hazlitt was asked if he wished his son to follow his own calling, "Oh! God forbid it!" was the quick and impatient reply. "Throw yourself from the steep Tarpeian rock, slap-dash headlong upon iron spikes," said Charles Lamb, "rather than become the slave of the booksellers!"

While authorship is often so poorly remunerated, it is, at the same time, the most exhausting of all kinds of mental labor. We are aware that there are a very few writers who think differently—whose views of literary labor are wholly rose-colored. Colonel T. W. Higginson declares, in an essay in the New York *Independent*, that he has never written anything which imposed on him at the time the feeling of drudgery. Few other professional writers—probably not one in a thousand—can boast of such a felicity. Of all the rest, giants or dwarfs, it may be safely asserted that, if there are moments of rapture in their lives which an angel might envy, there are moments, too, of despair which an outcast spirit might beg to be delivered from. It is for this reason that, with rare exceptions, indolence has been the natural habit of imaginative writers in every age. They have almost universally shrunk with instinctive dread from the work of formulating their ideas by thought; much more from that of passing them through the crucible of the ink-bottle—work which is reputed play, but which is, in fact, a battle every moment, between flesh and spirit. Dr. Johnson was, in this respect, a representative of authors in all ages and countries. Though he had abundant resources, and wrote rapidly when he had once broken the ice, yet he himself testifies that composition is usually an effort of slow diligence, to which an author is dragged by necessity, and from which the attention is every moment starting to pleasanter pursuits.

In view of the trials we have enumerated, but especially of the inadequate pecuniary compensation of literary toil, there are authors who, instead of being content that literature, like every other calling, should reap only its natural rewards, would have it endowed. They would have a public fund established for the support of deserving writers who derive an insufficient support from the sale of their works. In a paper on "Authors and Society," read recently before a club in this city, this measure was earnestly advocated. Among the considerations urged in its support is the fact that authors who are capable of far higher things are too often compelled to do hack-work, at once distasteful and inglorious, to support themselves and their families. Only by the severest and most exacting task-work of this kind can they win leisure for the nobler tasks which they love, and in the performance of which they can be most serviceable to society. Again, it is urged that to every nation's literature there must be many worthy contributions which will yield little or no pecuniary profit to author or publisher. There are productions which heavily tax thought, learning, and research, and from which the world derives priceless benefit, but at which no man toils with the hope of getting from their sale even a day-laborer's wages. Who has forgotten the fate of Hume's metaphysical works—works which changed the current of metaphysical thought, but found only here and there a reader, while his superficial history, now half-forgotten, yielded him £5,200 in copyright? Gibbon received, it is true, £6,000 for his great monumental history, the "Decline and Fall," which first bridged the gulf between the old world and the new; yet he toiled at his colossal task in defiance of pecuniary considerations; and the sum he received, he asserts, was only just enough to cover the value of the books which he had to buy for consultation. In our own day, have we not seen Herbert Spencer year after year heroically toiling at his great philosophical works, without the slightest expectation of a support from their sale?

Not only is there no pecuniary profit in those solid scientific and other works which are destined to illumine for a generation or more the minds

of a few men overtopping their fellow-mortals, and through these few to send a slowly-broadening light down through successive ages of culture, but the same thing is true of many lighter works—works of pure literature, of deliciously overburdened souls speaking to our souls, such as the poems of Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Keats, and the essays of De Quincey, Lamb, Hazlitt, and Hawthorne, which form for many of us so much of the charm of life. We know how long these exquisite productions were neglected by the public—our own shy and sensitive countryman being, as he has told us, for twenty years the most obscure man in America—and that, had their authors depended for a living upon the sale of their works, they must inevitably have starved. Yet such men are driven by the instinct and impulse of genius to toil at their thankless tasks. No divine monition compels a man to keep on making coats or hats, or selling cotton or wheat, if the business does not "pay." But the world wants the "Lyrical Ballads," and "Hyperion," and "The Princess," and Elia's "Essays," and the "Twice-Told Tales"; and the men who can produce such things feel that this is their God-given calling, and that they should be enabled to follow it without anxiety for their bread and butter.

In spite of these arguments, we think that to the scheme in question there are many and fatal objections. One of the chief is the extreme difficulty of distributing the public bounty judiciously and fairly. Supposing a fund established for the support or relief of deserving but neglected authors : who are to be its distributers? and how are they to determine who should be its recipients? In what scales are they to weigh literary productions so as to ascertain their value? By what anthropometer are they to test a writer's genius? Is there anything about which the most acute and intelligent men more widely differ than in their estimates of books and authors? Does not the history of literature abound with proofs that, if Homer sometimes nods, Aristarchus is oftener found napping? that, if works of genius are rare, just judgments of them and their authors are rarer still? Again, is there not reason to fear that in the dispensation of a literary fund personal interest and favoritism will have an influence? Will not the most pushing and self-asserting writers be most likely to receive aid, while the shy and retiring, but more meritorious, ones will be overlooked? It has been a standing complaint against the literary man that he is indolent, impulsive, fitful, and improvident; that he knows better how to earn money than how to spend or save it. He will buy a costly picture, it is said, when his butcher's or baker's bill is unpaid; will give his wife a piano when she needs a dress or a sewing-machine, and buy his children a rocking-horse when they want stockings. Will not these imprudences be aggravated if, whenever he feels the sting of want, he can look to a public fund for support? We believe that the best literary workers will prefer to stand on their own legs rather than on public crutches. Disguise it as we may, there is something humiliating (except in the case of chronic illness) in the thought that one is housed and fed under a literary "poor law." It will be a sad day for literature when it becomes not a profession, but a trade. In the hour when its rewards are dazzling enough and sure enough to tempt men to enter the lists for the sake of the reward, especially the pecuniary one,—to live by their art, instead of for their art,—it will undergo rapid deterioration.

If an author is forced by the necessity of bread to drudge at work of a lower kind than that which he aspires to perform, is his hardship exceptional? Does not the same evil fall to the lot of other professional men?

Do we not all have an inner life of the mind, for which we are forever yearning amid our toils, and in which we would spend all our time, did not the iron necessities of the outer call us in another direction? The curse of the literary profession is that, requiring no special preliminary training and no capital for its pursuit,—only a few quires of paper, a steel pen, and a bottle of ink,—it is recruited by all the vagrant talent of the world, and is consequently overstocked. When there is not enough employment for all, some must starve. An overstocked profession has been compared to a crew trying to save themselves by a raft scarcely large enough to carry half of them; and, again, to the inmates of the Black Hole at Calcutta, where all who could not get near the aperture in the wall were suffocated.

As to those great works which make epochs in a nation's life, and which have to wait long and weary years for appreciators, is not the same hardship the lot of all other professions as well as of literature? Does not the same thing occur in art, in science, in regard to mechanical inventions, and even, many times, in practical enterprises? How can the value of such phenomenal literary works be appreciated in dollars or doubloons? They are inestimable, and the remuneration for writing them, if remuneration be desired, must be sought, like that for the discovery of gravitation or the invention of anaesthetics, in the esteem and gratitude of mankind, and in the consciousness of having conferred an inestimable benefit upon one's fellow-beings.

Finally, we remark that the best literary work in all ages and countries, the weightiest as well as the most brilliant writing, has been done by men who were not what Byron satirizes as "fellows in foolscap uniform, turned up with ink"—that is, authors by profession; a fact which shows that literature has no need of public support. The great writers of Greece and Rome, of Italy and France, of England in the reigns of Elizabeth, the Charleses, Queen Anne, and the Georges, as we could show by hundreds of names that crowd to the point of our pen, were not generally literary men, as we now understand the term, but men of action, trained in business. Such writers have one great advantage over those who write for a living. Not only are their minds at ease, undistracted by any alien anxiety regarding rent, fire, clothing, and food, but the hours thus rescued from their callings, and looked forward to as an escape from money-scales and stocks, from horsehair and bombazine or drugs,—in short, as a change and a recreation,—become inexpressibly delightful; and they, consequently, lose no time in dawdling, but plunge at once into work and make every blow tell. Gifford, the old Quarterly Reviewer, who had had a vivid experience of the pangs and drudgery of writing for a living, once observed—and Coleridge has expressed the sentiment no less strongly—that "a single hour of composition won from the business of the day is worth more than the whole day's toil of him who works at the trade of literature: in the one case the spirit comes joyfully to refresh itself, like a hart to the water-brooks; in the other it pursues its miserable way, panting and jaded, with the dogs and hunger of necessity behind."

WILLIAM MATHEWS.

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#### THE COST OF CONTESTED ELECTIONS.

A MOST valuable commentary upon Speaker Reed's able article in THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW for last July, upon the subject of "Contested Elections," is furnished by the recent statement that the cost of the election contests in the House of Representatives of the Fifty-first Congress would